

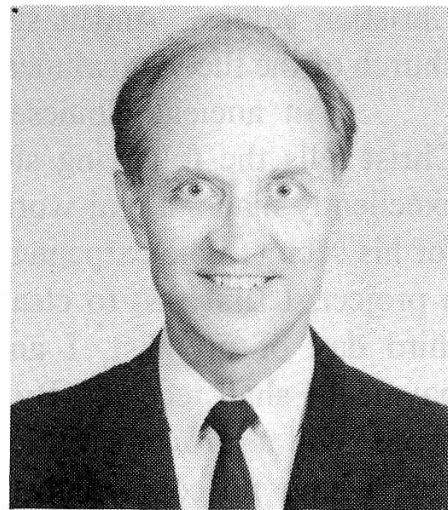
## *Hong Kong 1997: Church and Society*

*by Jack Clancey*

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### *Introduction*

**T**his article will specifically focus on the relationship between the Catholic Church and the post 1997 political structures and forces. Most of the questions I have heard addressed to me can be summed up in the question: "What actions will the People's Republic of China take in regard to the Catholic Church and other existing institutions when it regains sovereignty of this British Crown Colony?"



I'm sure you have been reading about two basic categories of views about the future of Hong Kong:

1. China is prepared to take away the basic gains that have been made over the past decade or more in regard to democracy and basic human rights - including the right to speak out freely and voice opinions about government policies - and how this will eventually lead to the downfall of Hong Kong as a stable and prosperous society; and
2. China will not take any actions or implement any policies that would change or undermine the stability, prosperity, or style of life enjoyed by people in Hong Kong.

The first view is held by an unknown number of people, but is best articulated by the Democratic Party, which is the political party with the largest bloc of members in the current Legislative Council. The second view has been presented by most pro-China institutions in Hong Kong and is best articulated by Mr. Tung Cheehwa, chosen to be the first Chief Executive of the Special Administrative Region.

These two views were re-enforced or made more complicated and unclear in recent months after Chinese officials established the Provisional Legislative Council and issued statements that the Provisional Legislative Council would amend the Bill of Rights Ordinance, as well as review sections of laws related to public law and order.

As a result of these recent actions, there is increasing concern in Hong Kong society about whether Hong Kong people will be allowed the high degree of autonomy promised in its two constitutional documents: the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

To help you understand a rather complicated scenario and specifically how Catholics in Hong Kong will be addressing these issues, I propose to first look specifically at the Catholic Church and the Communist Party and their likely interaction and then at the wider issues which will influence future developments in Hong Kong.

### *1. Sociological Interaction of Two Institutions*

Sociologically speaking, both the Catholic Church and the Communist Party are large, disciplined, hierarchical institutions. In both institutions there is a closed, dogmatic, conservative wing and at the other end of the spectrum there is an open, liberal, creative wing.

The conservative end of all institutions is primarily concerned with preserving and passing on dogma that was articulated and developed during an earlier period of the institution's history. The conservative approach is to repeat dogma and to insist that the experiences and lessons of the past can be applied - they would say *must be applied* - to every new situation. Those advocating this approach tend to forget that the dogmatic positions themselves were actually first developed as creative responses to particular historical problems. The dogmatic wing easily dismisses or ignores other institutions and tends to value only its own dogma.

The liberal end of an institution is ready to adapt the institution to the new needs and demands of an ever-changing society. The approach of this part of the institution is to seek to understand the core values of the institution and creatively adapt them to solve new problems and to evolve new approaches to enable the institution to develop a dialogical encounter with other institutions in the world. The

liberal wing usually operates from the presumption that it can learn from other institutions in society and can also have an influence on other institutions as they jointly cooperate on joint projects to improve society.

The interesting sociological point of the interaction between various institutions depends on which end of the spectrum at a given historical point in time has the predominant influence within the institution. This will hold true for the future interaction between the Catholic Church and the Communist Party.

I suggest the image of a pencil for each of the two institutions; with the sharp point of the pencil representing the dogmatic, hard-line camp within each institution and the soft eraser end representing the liberal, flexible wing of the institution. If the two pointed ends encounter one another there will be clashes, with each insisting that its point write the rules. If the two soft ends meet, both will be willing to make the necessary corrections or changes to allow for the flexibility for interaction that is acceptable to, and perhaps also mutually beneficial, to both institutions. That is not to suggest that either institution disregard its basic values or principles for the sake of opportunism. To the contrary this approach envisions that each institution will continue to preserve its identity and promote its values while seeking creative ways to adapt to changing circumstances and searching for ways to cooperate with other institutions.

## *2. Players in the Game*

In addition to institutional interaction, the dynamics that take place within each institution and between the institutions will be influenced by the backgrounds of members of the institutions and their personal charisma, energy and degree of active participation.

Within the Catholic Church there are individuals who are anti-Communist. There are also persons who don't care about historical or contemporary social issues; for all practical purpose these persons are satisfied to operate in a historical vacuum. For the purposes of this paper I am not interested in these two groups, and will focus on those people in the Catholic Church who have been actively concerned about social issues. But even among this group of persons there is also a range of positions. I would suggest the

following general categories of people that I have observed participating in social issues in Hong Kong.

In the late 1960's most Hong Kong people saw themselves as primarily Chinese; Chinese who just happened to be resident in Hong Kong. They considered this residency in Hong Kong as a "temporary" phenomenon, even if it had lasted for years, decades or generations. (If you look at the tombstones in Hong Kong's cemeteries the place of "origin" even for people born in Hong Kong is listed as the county from which their paternal grandfather originally came.) Most of the people in this category were not very interested in doing much work to improve Hong Kong society, as they thought they were only in Hong Kong to make money and after they made a sufficient amount they would return to their real home in China.

However, by the late 1960's some young people began describing themselves as Hong Kong persons. They persuasively argued that as Hong Kong persons they had the right and responsibility to help make Hong Kong a better place to live. They said that they wanted to fight for the basic rights of people in Hong Kong and that they should work to influence policy decisions that would affect Hong Kong's future. Older Chinese persons told them not to waste their time and energy being concerned about this "temporary home" and the British colonial types told them that if they did not like things the way they were, they should go back to China! However these people, formed groups and began to work for social change in Hong Kong. These groups, the most active of which were the student movement and the graduates of that movement, had a tremendous influence on Hong Kong society throughout the 1970's.

By the late 1970's another group began to emerge. This group emphasized that although they were concerned about Hong Kong issues, they saw themselves as primarily citizens of China; they emphasized that they were Chinese, not British. The members of this category were more explicitly anti-colonial and said they looked forward to the time when China would regain sovereignty over Hong Kong. This group tended to minimize the problems in China and emphasized the new economic and social breakthroughs that were beginning to take root there.

By the late 1980's another group began articulating a position that although they were citizens of China and looked forward to and

welcomed Chinese sovereignty, they saw themselves as primarily Hong Kong persons. This group began demanding even more political rights and social freedoms from the colonial government. They also began to demand that the future post-1997 government in Hong Kong should also guarantee these basic rights and freedoms. There are also some in this group who are convinced that they should take action to help develop democracy in China as well.

All of the people in this spectrum of groups are concerned about Hong Kong and want to contribute to making Hong Kong a better place in which to live. Most also want to make some contribution to improving the lives of people in China. All of them have been trying and will continue to try to convince others that their approach is the best. Hopefully this interaction will continue to be dialogical rather than confrontational.

I think there is also a similar spectrum of people within the Communist Party. According to news reports, there are, at one end of the spectrum, members of the Communist Party in some provinces of China who are very opposed to the Catholic Church. However, there does not seem to be any such group in Hong Kong.

The son of Qian Qichen, the foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, was quoted widely in a recent newspaper article when he returned to China after more than 6 years of study and work in the United States. His observations provide insights about other parts of the spectrum within the Communist Party. He noted that his father, as well as President Jiang and Prime Minister Li, along with many other current top officials, had, during their formative years, all studied in the former USSR. They were deeply influenced by their experience there and the political and economic models that they studied about and observed. On the other hand, Deng Xiaoping was influenced by his years studying and working in France, as well as by his travels to other European countries during that period.

The large number of Chinese people who are currently studying in the USA, Japan, Western Europe and Australia forms another part of the spectrum. A recent study documented that since 1978, 270,000 Chinese students have gone abroad to study - 40 per cent of them to the USA. From the mid-1980s most of the scholars opted to apply for a *green card* and stay in the USA. However the number of students returning to China increased dramatically after



1993 and a total of 30,000 scholars, most of whom have green cards, have returned to China. At least one city in China now has a mayor who was awarded an MBA by a university in the USA. As these people return to China to take up positions in government, business and academia they will bring a new and different approach to how to relate to institutions such as the Catholic Church.

In both the Catholic Church and the Communist Party there are groups that have pro-business interests and others who are pro-worker. In both institutions there are groups very concerned about the environment and women's issues while other groups give these a low priority. As with people in the Catholic Church, I think that there are members of the Communist Party - both in China and in Hong Kong - who are concerned about the future of Hong Kong and who are committed to ensuring the success of Hong Kong and making China a stronger and better country. Likewise people in the Communist Party will also use their own experience and perspectives as the starting point for deciding which options they think are best for Hong Kong. Again, hopefully there will be dialogue rather than confrontation within the institution when there are disagreements over policy options.

### *3. The Greater Context: China (Economic and Political/Legal/Social)*

Recently at a group discussion session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, General Liu Huaqing, Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission, quoted Deng Xiaoping as saying that social and political stability held utmost importance and that there would not be development without stability.

The chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC), Qiao Shi, has consistently emphasized that the NPC would push for legislative supervision of the Government, the Party and the Army. He has also advocated strongly for legal reform and the development of democracy. He has also said that Communist Party officials should welcome supervision from non-communist parties and accept their criticisms and suggestions.

Without going into a lot of examples I think you are as aware as I am that within China there is ongoing discussion, if not debate,

about whether there should be more participation by more people in more aspects of the decision making process. The most obvious example is that of the State run enterprises. These enterprises are very unhealthy and are not able to compete at all with those companies which are more decentralized and better able to respond to market forces, namely producing what consumers think is better or cheaper.

There are increasing demands for accountability of government officials. There is also an interesting experiment with open, free, democratic elections at the grass roots. There was one news report that former President Jimmy Carter's center in Atlanta, which has a lot of experience in monitoring elections in many countries, was invited to monitor local level elections in one province.

There is also an increasing movement to run society according to the rule of law rather than depending on the decisions of key bureaucrats, personal contacts, or the final arbitration of key members of the Communist Party.

These are but a few examples of the many changes taking place in China. It is only to state the obvious to say that the pace and extent of the changes in China will have an influence on Hong Kong.

#### *4. The Greater Context - International Reality*

It is also to state the obvious that the people of Hong Kong are looking to see what is being done in developed countries and not only in science, technology, and infrastructure development, but also in terms of the latest experiments with education, fashion, values, and culture. Hong Kong people know that each country has evolved in response to its own unique historical circumstances and material conditions, but they also want to see how they can adopt the best of what works well in other countries to make their own city a better place. This applies to food, clothes, music, art, and participation in social and political issues, as well as the development of political structures to protect and promote the basic human rights of each individual.

## *5. Models for Hong Kong*

While much of the discussion on Hong Kong's future has focused on political structures, democracy and human rights issues, it is not possible to separate these from the economic foundation of Hong Kong. Darwin documented how various species of birds evolved to adapt to their specific environments or material conditions. Likewise Hong Kong's economic and political structures as well as culture have evolved in response not only to certain material conditions that were present in the world and in the region, but also because of the unique temperament and entrepreneurial drive of the flood of immigrants from the coastal provinces of China, primarily from neighboring Guangdong Province.

The general atmosphere in Hong Kong is that, as long as you are not engaged in illegal activities, you will be allowed to establish any kind of business. Many of these small companies have done well; others have gone bankrupt, while others have found their special niche as profitable small or medium companies in a very competitive market.

Something similar has happened with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), concerned about activities ranging from sports to culture to social welfare to social issues. These NGOs in a sense compete for members and funds and their general health, if they survive for long, reflects the corresponding general interest in their activities. In other words, they also thrive or die, or provide for a special niche service by responding to a type of "market force."

Singapore has been proposed as a kind of alternative model for the future development of Hong Kong and perhaps even China. The suggestion was that Singapore has a very liberal economic environment, while maintaining a very restrictive climate in regard to political control over all areas of life.

A few years ago the former Prime Minister of Singapore gave a luncheon talk at the Foreign Correspondent's Club in Hong Kong. He said that he once told Deng Xiaoping that he wondered how things would have been different in Singapore and China if he (Lee Kwan Yu) were the Prime Minister of China and Deng was the Prime Minister of Singapore. Lee told the FCC gathering that Deng did not



say a thing in reply. I wonder if that was one of the many occasions when Deng decided to make use of the brass spittoon that sat on the floor next to his chair. Lee's speculation was rather surprising in that he could not even maintain unity between Malaya and Singapore, while Deng did a fantastic job of balancing a very complex political system that includes not only more than 20 percent of the world's people, but numerous conflicting political and economic interests.

With all due respect to the people of Singapore, I think that it was very presumptuous of the former Prime Minister of Singapore to try to promote the "unique" experience of a small city of less than three million people as a model for other parts of the world. His autocratic style was not that unique nor really an "Asian model." Governments in the 1930's in Italy, Germany and Spain and in Japan tried similar experiments, which were eventually rejected by the majority of the people even though they initially enjoyed economic benefits. Mayor Daly of Chicago also maintained tight control over a city much larger and more complex than Singapore. The former Prime Minister used to talk about maintaining balance among three major ethnic groups in a city with four official languages. While Los Angeles does not have that many official languages, more than 90 languages are used in schools where bi-lingual education is promoted for new immigrants and more than 90 languages are used in Catholic churches every Sunday morning.

More to the point is that Singapore not only maintains tight control over non-economic affairs, but the economy is also highly influenced by investments by government administered bodies or state holding corporations which play a dominant role in many key sectors of the economy. These companies place an emphasis on good management. The Singapore model might be attractive to the "big capitalists" in Hong Kong and their business partners with access to State owned firms in China, but this model is not attractive at all to the numerous entrepreneurs who are one of the key factors behind Hong Kong's economic success. Hong Kong has been successful because it has evolved an interesting balance between big companies with their emphasis on management and small and medium companies which are able to react more quickly to market forces. To put all the emphasis on large, well managed companies to the detriment of the

small entrepreneurs will definitely disturb the balance in Hong Kong and could well lead to undermining its stability and prosperity.

Of particular concern to us here is the Singapore model regarding NGOs. The government seems to think it best that anything the government or PAP thinks is political should be off bounds to other groups in society. In other words the government is against independent NGOs maintaining or promoting alternative views or articulating criticism of government policies, even those related to economic, social, religious, and cultural issues. I will say a few words later about this philosophical approach of a government dominating all sections of life and society. Here I would only point out that the Singapore model - developed for a small city, with a not very complex society, at a time of slow change in the world - *might* work for other small cities. The model might work *IF* government officials were creative enough to anticipate all future economic and social trends and quick enough to make the appropriate decisions and develop the correct policies for an increasingly complex and rapidly changing society.

However, with a society as complex as Hong Kong and with the world changing so fast, the odds are not in favor of a small group of bureaucrats, no matter how intelligent and how well informed, always being able to develop the correct political, economic and social policies without constant input by and criticism from its citizens and concerned groups. Without feedback or criticism on current policies and future options from citizens and concerned groups, a top heavy management approach could easily make the wrong policy decisions, which could lead to future problems or even a disaster. The current Hong Kong model of allowing, and even encouraging, organized groups to voice their views and articulate alternative approaches for consideration by government bureaucrats ensures that both the government and all concerned citizens have access to a wider range of input and perspectives before and after decisions are made. This ongoing dialogue allows for policies to be improved before they are implemented and to be changed after they go into effect.

Hong Kong's economic and political success can be attributed to the fact that since the government and the market responds to the demands of the people, an increasing number of people are encouraged to participate and become involved.

The bamboo best symbolizes the traditional Chinese cultural approach that evolved over thousands of years: when the wind blows, bamboo bends; it does not try to resist the wind and when the wind stops, the bamboo stands upright again. Chinese people have appeared to be obedient and submissive, while they have actually been patiently awaiting their chance to speak up or strike out when the circumstances allowed. People did not speak up or openly oppose the government or someone in power for fear of being killed, imprisoned or losing all one's economic assets.

In the past two decades a cultural revolution has been taking place in Hong Kong. People have been speaking up and criticizing government bureaucrats and demanding that their voices be heard and their opinions considered when decisions are being made that will affect society and their lives. Most people in Hong Kong do not want to go back to the way the situation was 40 years ago when only the rich and powerful had any influence on those who made political and economic decisions.

Another point is that the people in Singapore who equate Asian values with the passive acceptance of the views and decisions of political leaders seem to forget that the political structure in some Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan have allowed for increasing democratization and participation by the people in all aspects of societal decisions. Even in larger countries such as India, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, where political leaders have experimented with and eventually rejected an authoritarian government because of pressure from the people, government leaders are now pursuing more market oriented economic development policies and placing much more emphasis on democratic participation. President Ramos of the Philippines is reported to have rejected the advice of a Singaporean politician that the Philippines should have a more authoritarian form of government with the comment, "We tried that already and it didn't work."

## *6. Role of the Church - A Ying Yang Balance*

I don't think there is a need for me to quote from recent church documents to support the view that people of faith should be concerned about social issues and social justice. The Vatican Council

document, *The Church in the Modern World* as well as the encyclicals of Pope John XIII, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, all stress the need for Catholics to become involved in helping to build a better world. These teachings also emphasize the need for dialogue with all peoples and the need for cooperation in the work of developing our world.

You are familiar with these themes. The main point I wish to stress is the need for the church to be in a dialogical relationship with other institutions and groups working to build a better society. The new post-Vatican II perspective is based on the recognition that we in the Church don't have all the solutions to the problems of the world: This perspective is based on the premise that, together with other groups, we in the Catholic Church can analyze what are the causes of social problems and that together we can cooperate in the work of building a better world. At times we can also agree to differ and to try different approaches, as long as we all respect the rights of others and none of us seeks to impose our views or to oppress others.

There is also the need to help others understand the church's perspective that there is no clear dividing line between religion and politics. I have dealt with this in greater detail in another paper - *Theological Reflections on Yin and Yang*. My position is that politicians, such as Singapore's Lee and others, do not have the right to encapsulate all human affairs within the realm of politics. There are social issues, which are of concern to both politics and faith. Society and the members of society can only benefit from a dialogue between government officials and members of non-government organizations including church groups, on issues of concern to all. If government officials seek to impose their views, they might come up with the correct solutions to social problems, but there is also a good chance they will implement unsuitable policies. The process of placing all social issues within the purview of politics is to deny others the right to participate.

The dilemma faced by church people in a society where politicians want to dominate all aspects of society is similar to the dilemma that was forced on Antigone. A new king issued an edict that anyone who attempted to bury the body of a young man who lay dead in front of the city walls would be killed. The new king was Antigone's uncle and the dead body was that of her brother. Antigone

describes how she had to choose between the law of the king and the higher law that demanded that all dead should be given a decent burial. Antigone was condemned to death because she decided to obey the higher law and bury her brother.

All religions consider a mourning or burial service as being of concern to religions. Religions also consider that persons have a right to say a final good-bye to their deceased relatives and friends. Most governments would recognize this right of individuals and religions. However there are other areas which religions also consider within their purview; areas about which they have a right to speak out. For example, in recent decades the Catholic church has spoken out on and taken positions on such issues as abortion, the rights of workers, the rights of women, nuclear weapons, the environment, human rights and the economic gap between rich and poor. While the Catholic church does not wish to impose its views on others, it is part of our belief that we have a right and responsibility to help to influence political decisions which are made on these important issues as well as other matters.

In a modern, complex society, there are therefore social issues, which do not belong exclusively to politics or religion or economics. These are issues about which there needs to be a dialogue among all citizens who want to contribute to building a better society. The Catholic Church has established Justice and Peace Commissions to help its members learn more about such social issues and to help the church articulate its position on these issues. In post 1997 Hong Kong, as at present, the Catholic Church as a whole, and its Justice and Peace Commission, will continue to be concerned about issues such as democracy and human rights, issues which some politicians would consider political issues. Catholics hope - and expect - that the future HKSAR government will not only guarantee their right to go to church and pray together, but will also respect their right to speak out on issues and their right to participate in the process of helping to develop and improve policies which affect the lives of people in Hong Kong.



## 7. *Personal Views*

As a Christian I am a person full of hope. Hope does not mean that I merely wish that things will go well. Hope leads me to believe that - no matter how difficult are the obstacles we will encounter, or no matter how serious are the problems we must solve - God will accompany us and help us to find creative ways to overcome the obstacles or to solve the problems.

Furthermore, my experience in Hong Kong during the last 29 years tends to make me optimistic. Hong Kong today enjoys many rights and freedoms that were not allowed in the 1970's. These freedoms were won because small groups of committed persons constantly demanded basic human rights. Hope leads me to believe that these freedoms will not be taken away to the extent that the situation will revert to fifty years ago. I think the worse possible scenario would be a return to the state of affairs in Hong Kong in the early 1970's. If the government decided to change the system too much, there would not only be a strong reaction from Hong Kong, but very likely also from the international community.

No matter what the future may bring, I am confident that the people in Hong Kong will, as they have always done, come up with innovative ways to overcome difficult social, economic and political dilemmas. I'm sure that all sides will search for creative ways to resolve future problems and that Catholics will be willing to participate in the process. □

